

# **Resilience and Risk Reduction**

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## **Comprehensive Resilience Module**

### **Family Dimension**

### ***“Stranger In My Home”***

***Supporting a Resilient and Ready Force***

# Stranger In My Home Overview



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# Stranger In My Home

In this scenario, is an excerpt of a conversation between a Soldier and his spouse:

**Spouse:** You never talk to me anymore. It's like you're doing everything you can to shut me out. You're so angry all the time. You're just so different.

**Soldier:** I don't know what to say.

**Spouse:** You want to tell me what happened over there?



You've grown apart from the family.

Your lives have been half a world apart in miles and more than that in culture.

Your lives have been vastly different.



You and your family can bridge the gap by asking open-ended questions.

- Most Soldiers, tendency will be to withdraw when they get home.
- Protect your family from the hell you've seen without denying them the person they love.

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# Principles

Sometimes when Soldiers return home, their spouses find them:

To be distant

Withdrawn

They're trying to bridge two very different worlds.



It can be really awkward and difficult to know:

Just how to act

How to break the ice

What to say

what to do.



*Ask a question that is a bigger and deeper question;  
something you really want to know about your  
partner's thoughts, or feelings, or experiences.*

**Asking Open-Ended Questions can really open the heart allowing both partners to gently and more fully reunite as well as bridge across the gaps that are created by the deployment.**

# Scenario



❑ Now let's look at this scenario...

❑ The couple has become alienated from each other due to the vastly different lives they have been leading at home and abroad, separated by half a world. Let's see how asking Open-Ended Questions can be a very helpful bridge in bringing them closer together.

Female: You never talk to me anymore. It's like you're doing everything you can to shut me out. You're so angry all the time. You're just so different.

Male: I don't know what to say.

Female: You want to tell me what happened over there?



❑ You have some choices of how you respond.



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# Scenario Response Choices

## ❑ Soldier Response 1 – **Bad Aggressive**

Male: I don't want to talk about this! I don't even want to think about it!

Female: (looks scared while he screams)

Aggressive - Telling your partner to shut up will probably only hurt your partner's feelings and drive a wedge between the two of you. Instead, talk about what you need and ask your partner an open-ended question. For example you could say, "It's going to be hard for me to talk about what happened to me over there. Maybe we could start by YOU telling ME what happened to you while I was gone."



## ❑ Soldier Response 2 – **Bad Withdrawn**

Male: No point in talking about it.

Withdrawn - Withdrawing and not saying anything just closes a door. It keeps your partner from ever knowing you. Withdrawing will make your partner feel hopeless about ever being able to get close to you again. Instead, talk about what you need and ask your partner an open-ended question.



## ❑ Soldier Response 3 – **Positive**

Male: Look, I know there's things I've got to tell you, but it's tough. Why don't you tell me about some of the things that were hard for you when I was gone?

Female: (smiles)

This is a great choice. It tells your partner that it's going to be difficult for you to talk about your experiences but that you want to. It also opens things up by you asking the first open-ended question.



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# Activity I

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- ❑ In this activity, you will have a chance to help bridge the communication gap and connect the Soldiers and their family by choosing the open-ended questions.
- a.) “I know you and the kids are in a daily routine that works for you. Why don’t you tell me about it so I can be a part of your routine?”
- b.) “Are you picking up the kids today?”
- c.) “What are some of the things you want to know about my life while I was deployed?”
- d.) “Are you glad I am back?”
- e.) “What do you want to do Saturday night?”



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# Activity II



- ❑ In this activity, you will have a chance to help connect this Soldier and her spouse by choosing her response being either aggressive, withdrawn or positive.

- **Male Spouse (angry voice): “You don’t know anything about what I went through while you were deployed!”**



- ❑ **Female Soldiers Response:**

- a.) “Ok, you’re right I don’t know, but I would like you to tell me. Why don’t you start from the beginning? What was it like for you while I was gone?”
- b.) “A bunch of small stuff I bet compared to what I went through. You have no idea?”
- c.) “You probably wouldn’t understand anyway so no point in telling you.”



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# Take Away



There may be things that you choose never to share with your family, but you need to be aware if you are withdrawing, and find a buddy to confide in.



They are trying to relearn how it's going to work. Asking Open-Ended Questions can help.



It might take a while for the answers to start flowing naturally.



When you withdraw, it's almost like there is a stranger in the house, that they are trying to get to know.



It might be your spouse or child that is withdrawing.



People need to trust each other before they can freely express themselves.

**Your family may be tougher than you think. Sharing your experiences with them helps them to appreciate what you do, why you do it and makes them a more resilient support system for you.**

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